

National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics Advisory Board

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DRAFT MINUTES Executive Committee Meeting Washington, DC

Tuesday, August 4, 2009, 8:30-2:00PM EST

Executive Committee Members Present: Dr. Martin Massengale, Chair; Dr. Fred Cholick; Mrs. Carol Keiser-Long; Dr. Tom Rosol; Mrs. Jean-Mari Peltier; Dr. Mary Wagner; Dr. Walt Armbruster

Executive Committee Members Absent: Mr. Terry Wolf; Dr. Edward Runge

Ex-Officio: Dr. Katherine Smith, Acting, REE Deputy Under Secretary

Guests: Dr. Mark Walbridge, REEO; Dr. Catherine Parks, REEO; Dr. Jill Auburn, REEO; Dr. Maura O'Neill, REE Chief of Staff;

NAREEE Board Staff: Ms. Karen Hunter, Executive Director

Martin Massengale welcomed the group and thanked them for traveling to Washington to participate in the meeting.

Kitty Smith met with the Executive Committee and provided a presentation from Dr. Shah regarding the National Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) and outlined the 5 major focus areas for the mission area.

Dr. Shah's goal is to double the REE budget, primarily into NIFA, and on focused issues rather than "across the board" increases in program funding. His strategy is outcome-oriented and aligned with the goals of the President and the Secretary of Agriculture. Dr. Smith noted that it was important to determine USDA's comparative advantage among other federal agencies.

The five areas to focus research on in the REE mission area are: 1) bioenergy, 2) climate change, 3) international food security, 4) food safety, and 5) childhood nutrition and health. These five areas are not meant to be all-encompassing, but are intended to focus the research efforts of the mission area.

The new NIFA organizational strategy will utilize a Policy Council and a Science Council. It was noted that the NAREEE Advisory Board could serve in some capacity as the Policy Council, providing input and

advice on a broad, overarching level. The Science Council would be comprised of 8-10 high level, expert scientists able to offer more specific advice on scientific matters.

The Research, Education, and Extension Office (REEO) Division Chiefs in attendance (Catherin Parks, Mark Walbridge, and Jill Auburn), shared some information on the progress of the REE Roadmap. Their information has been provided to the Under Secretary's office and is currently being crosswalked with the priority areas and NIFA organizational strategy. The goal is to have the roadmap and the final NIFA organization strategy released at the same time.

There was some discussion about the five goals not involving processing and production technologies, nor was there a specific priority on maintaining agricultural production. Dr. Smith elaborated that the five priority areas encompass agricultural production, but do not name it as a specific goal. She explained that the priority areas were meant to have some cross-cutting components; production and processing was one such item.

Dr. Smith emphasized that Dr. Shah's intent (as well as Secretary Vilsack's goal) is to raise the visibility of the quality science funded by USDA. Dr. Shah is still gathering his staff and determining how to best utilize the expertise of the REEO Division Chiefs.

Mark Walbridge gave an update on the Global Crop Modeling program. The ultimate goal of the program is to allow for increased food production for the growing population. Martin Massengale made the comment that water was also not specifically listed as a priority area, but obviously was important in the production of food and energy crops. Although water isn't explicitly listed as a priority, like agricultural production and processing, it cuts across the areas and is addressed within each particular priority.

Jill Auburn commented on changes in the different sectors of agriculture and the changes in skills and adaptations.

Catherine Parks commented on plant health and production; current topics of particular importance are diseases and the integration of plant production issues within the goal areas.

Jill Auburn also shared some notes on nutrition topics from Mary Gray, who was unable to attend the meeting. Mary's notes indicated that childhood obesity statistics seem to be leveling off. She also noted the cost of obesity to society, especially in the form of increased health care costs. One statistic that was shared: the average person takes in 700 more calories than needed per day. Nutrition education needs to focus on teaching children how to make healthy choices. Adult nutrition education should also focus on food security and distribution.

The point was brought up several times that USDA needs to use what it does well to capitalize and build further opportunities.

Kitty Smith commented that the agencies were looking at different ways to make the granting process more efficient and effective, resulting in a lower transaction cost for researchers. This would require input on the granting and request for proposals processes. Other agencies use a "letter of intent" or "pre-proposal" system which allows program leaders to quickly triage initial applications and request full proposals from only the most promising applicants. This would increase the overall award rate for proposals and reduce the amount of time applicants spent preparing proposals (i.e., researchers invest a

short amount of time preparing a brief outline of the proposed project, but if the pre-proposal isn't accepted, then they haven't invested hours of time creating the full document). Input from the Board would be appreciated. Martin Massengale indicated that this could be something for the Protocol Committee to discuss at the October meeting.

Question: how does USDA attract different scientists to compete for projects supported by the proposed goals? Is there a component of demonstration value? Will highly-respected political appointees attract other top-notch researchers?

Entrepreneurship must play a key role in agriculture. Public-private partnerships are critical. Rural Development forms partnerships with economic groups.

What is the role of the NAREEE Advisory Board? Dr. Massengale pointed out that the Board should be in sync with the Department's goals, but that the Board is not restricted to opine only on Department-identified topics. How can the Board help agricultural groups (commodity groups, stakeholders, non-profit organizations) get behind agriculture and provide support. USDA needs proactive stakeholder input rather than reactive input. As a potential Policy Council, the NAREEE Advisory Board could provide some of this proactive input and facilitate broader stakeholder input.

It is still very important for the Department to publicize the good work of the USDA, especially as it relates to the five priority goal areas.

There was some discussion regarding topics for the October 28-30 Board meeting. Fred Cholic is leading a Work Group to develop a focus session on Extension. Healthy living, nutrition, and obesity were discussed as potential topics for a second focus session.

Several members present asked for an overview of what the Department was doing in various nutrition/health research areas. Mary Gray was suggested as a person to ask for numbers on REE expenditures in health/nutrition programs.

Obesity in youth was selected as a topic for the second focus session in the October meeting.

Depending upon if/when Dr. Shah is available to join the Board in October, the tentative plan is to have orientation on the first day, followed by a brief session (no more than 1.5 hours) with the Protocol Committee, then the Extension focus session in the morning on the second day, and then the Nutrition/Obesity/Youth focus session in the afternoon on the second day.

International food security was suggested as a potential future topic, focusing on USDA's role in assisting with global food security.

Maura O'Neill was able to join the Executive Committee for a short briefing. She provided the members with her background information and shared some of her thoughts on the direction of the mission area and the five priority areas.

Some additional discussion ensued regarding whether the Executive Committee should try and set up a meeting with Dr. Shah in September, since he was unable to attend the meeting in August. Martin will work with Maureen Wood in the Under Secretary's office to see if another date/time is possible.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:40 PM.